

From the SMA



U.S. Army Photo

I can't believe 2005 is halfway done. Our Army has been so busy over the last few months, and I'm proud to say our Soldiers are doing a magnificent job furthering freedom and liberty for cultures around the world. Our Soldiers and leaders should stand proud of all they have accomplished so far this year, and I thank you for all you have done, all you are doing and all you will continue to do in support of our Army and the defense of the people of the United States.

I want to talk about two issues that have been in the news lately, recruiting and retention. All of our missions — the Global War on Terror, Transformation, and the thousand other missions lined up behind them — are built on a foundation of recruiting and retention. I am asking that every NCO at every level make it his personal mission to help recruiting and retention in anyway he can.

Recruiting and retention have been misrepresented in the mainstream media. Our goals seem off because we are growing. Recruiters are not just maintaining our old manpower levels. They are mandated to increase them. The common man's math works out to be a growth of roughly 10,000 additional Soldiers yearly. It's not that simple, but that gives you a rough idea of the growth we need. At the start of last year Congress authorized us to grow by 30,000 Soldiers. At that time, the active-duty force was 482,400 strong. Our end state over a three-year period is to have an active-duty force of 512,400.

In order to reach those goals, we implemented higher recruiting and retention goals to grow this additional force structure. In 2003, our recruiting goal was 71,000. That is the amount of Soldiers we need to recruit each year to maintain our normal end-strength of 482,400. In 2004, we raised our recruiting goals to 77,000. We finished last year at 101 percent. This year, we raised the goal again to 80,000. We fell short of our goals in February, March, April and May. For the month of June, we achieved 109 percent. The success in June has helped make up some of the deficit, but we still have much work to do.

The second step in growing our Army is retention. In 2003, our active component retention goal was 52,000. Last year, we raised our goal to 56,000. All of you are responsible for last year's success. This year we challenged you again with a mission of 64,000. To date, we are at 104 percent of our year-to-date retention goals. We are projected to make our retention and end-strength missions. Our goal is to finish the year at 502,400 Soldiers.

Our recruiters are focused and engaged daily to meet this

tough mission. They deserve some positive feedback and so I wanted to share with you that our recruiters are working hard to replenish our ranks with the next generation of patriots.

Where I need your help as NCOs and especially all the senior NCOs is to identify those young men and women who have the potential to make great recruiters. I ask you to first look at our returning veterans. They have the kind of experience we need on the streets right now.

Those young NCOs with combat experience, many of whom are just a year or two older than their potential recruits, can sit in that person's home and speak candidly to their parents about Army life. They can serve as an example and role model of the professional, mature, young man or woman their son or daughter can become.

I encourage those of you who are not in the business of recruiting and retention to tell your good stories every chance you can. The American people deserve to know the great things you are doing. Don't pass up an opportunity to highlight the good news stories that aren't shown on the 6 o'clock news. Tell your families; tell your friends; and tell your local newspaper with a hometown news release.

I ask leaders of departing Soldiers to encourage their subordinate leaders to focus on the departing Soldiers' contributions to the Army. Remind your subordinate leaders that those departing Soldiers will serve as ambassadors and promote their positive experience in the Army to the American public. We do not want to give them an unfavorable experience as they leave the service. Soldiers should be celebrated, honored and recognized at a formal ceremony, receive their award for service, and paid tribute for their desire to serve their Nation.

Ask your subordinate leaders to always suggest Reserve or Guard service in their final counseling sessions with their departing Soldiers. Have them bring in a Guard or Reserve recruiter if necessary to help them understand the benefits of being a Citizen Soldier.

Finally, we are still in the business of keeping our best and brightest. More than anything we must keep talking retention and the benefits of continued service. We are working hard to provide the quality of life for Soldiers and their families. Although a lot of media focus is on our recruiting, the reality is our retention efforts are sky-rocketing. All our components are over 100 percent of their quotas and I'm proud to say the National Guard has the highest retention rates in its long and proud history. It is an incredibly good story you unfortunately won't hear about on the 6 o'clock news. I ask you to pass the word of our retention success to Soldiers and peers. We must tell our own good news stories if the media won't help us.

In closing, I want to personally thank our recruiters and retention NCOs. It is your hard work and personal commitment that directly impacts our stability. I invite all NCOs to shake the hand of the next retention NCO or recruiter you see and thank them for all of their hard work. And for our brave young men and women who have served our country honorably and are looking at getting out of the service to move on to civilian careers, I want to thank you as well for your service to our nation. You are all heroes and will always be Soldiers.

HOOAH!

Kenneth O. Preston

Sergeant Major of the Army